

i didn't know that i was starving til i tasted you; don't need no butterflies when you give me the whole damn zoo by ceruleanstorm

Series: [should i stay or should i go; \[8\]](#)

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Summary:

“So let me get this straight,” Jonathan pops around the corner, holding a frying pan and simultaneously trying to drain the bacon grease into an old aluminium can. El sinks in her chair, knowing they were listening the whole time. “You two found the salt, Mike climbed up the aisle to get the salt because it was on the very top even though El could have, I dunno, gotten it with her powers, Mike then got stuck up there, and then when you two were about to get caught El exploded all the flour and sugar to make it so nobody could see her getting you back down, Mike?”

El and Mike nod, but share a quick look and a smile. They had left out some of the story, the part about El asserting they should break up walking them backwards into finally, finally, dating. But with

Jonathan and Will eavesdropping in the kitchen and the almost certainty Joyce would repeat those specific details to the Chief, they kept it their secret.

**i didn't know that i was starving til i tasted you; don't
need no butterflies when you give me the whole damn
zoo**

Author's Note:

IM BAAAAACK!!!! and I brought fluff with me.

based off the date a boy suggestion: Date a boy
who'll climb up the shelf at the grocery store to get
you that thing you wanted from the top shelf, even
though he's the same height as you

“Okay, okay, wait, please- please just start over. From the, the top,
please.”

“Ha, *the top*. Kinda like where Mike got stuck.”

“You know *what* , Will?”

“Mike- just- Will, honey, please stay out of this.”

Under the wide, frustrated gaze of her surrogate mother, El wanted nothing more than to disappear, to sink out of the chair she'd been sat down in the minute she ran through the screen door. Joyce paced nervously, back and forth and back and forth, her fingers twitching and reaching for her pocket every few minutes for a cigarette that wasn't there. Will sat cross legged on the kitchen counter, a devilish grin that matched his brother's, who was lounging near the refrigerator. In the chair next to her own, Mike's leg brushed against hers as he bounced it, a nervous habit he hadn't had when she had first met him. El looked over to see he was biting his thumb nail too. Clenching her fingers in a small fist, El swallowed the urge to put her hand on his legs to calm him and take his hand in her own, because she was still kind of mad at it at him. No, scratch that. She was still *very* mad at him. This was *his* fault.

Sighing again, Joyce plants her hands on her hips and El grimaces. “I give you two some simple instructions, a simple run to the grocery store, and you come back, what, covered in flour?”

“And sugar!” adds Will. Excitement is written all over his smug face.

“And- and sugar.” Joyce nods, gesturing backwards to Will.

“Is that egg in your hair, Mike?” Jonathan leans forward, a sly grin on his face. Mike’s brown eyes widen - *damn those stupid beautiful eyes of his, don’t give in El, don’t give in!* - and his hands fly to his hair. El shoots Jonathan a look, one of her “iconic glares” as the boys call them, and Jonathan’s smile melts.

There wasn’t any egg in Mike’s hair, maybe shortening, but there *couldn’t* have been egg. Because El hadn’t made any egg cartons explode. Not a single shell. But there was flour and sugar and maybe even salt and it covered every inch of the two of them, and El slumped, trying to remember what containers her brain hadn’t blown up and which ones it had. The baking ingredients dusted Mike’s jacket and nose like snow, and when he ran his hand through his wild hair to check for egg, he sent a flurry of white around him like a halo. Head to toe, El was also covered in the stuff. It was in every crease of her dress, on her lips and eyelashes, in the pockets of Mike’s borrowed jacket and when she curled her toes in, she knew there was some in her socks.

“What am I supposed to say to Hopper?” as Joyce mutters the words, slumping defeated into a kitchen chair and taking the hand Jonathan’s placed on her shoulder, guilt floods El like a dam breaking. She disappointed Joyce Byers, the woman who had been nothing but kind to her, and the familiar sting of disappointing someone- not just anyone but *her* , made her want to will her every cell into another room, How could she blame Mike when this was so her fault?

“How ‘bout, “Sorry Hop, but at least it wasn’t my cooking that ruined your birthday.” You know, that’ll be a change for this year.” Will suggests, trying to laugh the awkwardness of the room away. El just slumps in her chair further.

Mike’s fingers brush her own, and El brings her teeth down on her tongue. She will *not* give in and reach for his hand. Nope. Not going to happen. *Stay strong El, we’re mad at him. No matter whose fault this or if he looks adorable covered in flour! There’s still some on his nose...*

"We can try and make another run, if you want, to another store." Mike offers, and his sweet voice fills her ears. She faces him then, for first time since they were sentenced to identical kitchen chairs, covered in flour and sugar, but with sincerity in his brown eyes and guilt on his face. There's no point in fighting it now, El realizes- he's feeling all she is- and finds his hand. He intertwines her fingers, running his thumb over her knuckles, like he always. The next time El can make herself look over, his shoulders are almost relaxed.

"Thank you Mike, but there's no time. He's going to be here in an- in an hour. We'll just order a pizza and I'll make it up to him next year." sighs Joyce, her fingers digging in her pocket again, coming up empty once more.

It's Jonathan who perks up, with a wide smile on his face as he pats Joyce on the back. "Hey, Mom, why don't I cook? That way he still has dinner and we don't have to air out the kitchen when we're done."

"I thought all you could make was breakfast?" Mike asks, his voice skeptical like the way he spoke to Nancy (El knew the two only picked on each other because Jonathan had just started dating Nancy, and it made things weird for Mike), his face scrunching up. Biting her tongue again, El has to count to ten to fight her laughter, and Mike squeezes her hand. When she turns back to him, she's met with the devious expression she had come to know as he winks at her. She squeezes back.

"Well," Already swinging open the fridge door and taking out a carton of eggs, Jonathan laughs "who doesn't love breakfast for dinner? How does scrambled eggs sound, Mike?"

Mike's mouth opens just enough, but before El could watch him retort, Will was hoping down from the counter announcing, "I'll help! Hey Jonathan, can you pass me the *flour*?"

"I hate both of you." Mike mutters next to her, putting his head in his hands. El wasn't sure she could have been more terrifying in her glare, and satisfaction took over her smile when both Will and Jonathan sunk back.

“That’s- that’s a good idea, boys. He’ll like that.” Joyce’s fallen face was replaced by a shining smile, dizzy with pride, at her two sons. But that didn’t last as she turned to face Mike and El once more. “And it will give me to hear this story. The *whole* story, you two.”

Mike gives her a nervous look and visibly gulps, and then she’s grabbing his hand and squeezing it once more.

Together?

Together.

-

El and Mike had been walking the fragile line between friends and *more than friends* since her return in the fall of 1984 and he fainted at the sight of her bundled in a castle of blankets on the Byers’ love seat. He’d crumbled to the floor right before El’s eyes before she even got the chance to say his name, and for the first time in the nine hours since Hopper had put her there and Joyce attacked her with blankets, pillows, and questions, El was off the couch, standing yet frozen in a panic because she thought she’d just *killed* Mike Wheeler.

Will and Joyce were quick to explain Mike had only passed out (“He’s really missed you! And- and, he’s just in shock, okay?” Will told her), but El started crying anyways and the silent tears didn’t stop rolling down her face until Mike woke up on the couch next to her, dazed and confused from a concussion, the result of hitting the coffee table when he fell, but also at the strange sight of her. And then she was in his arms immediately, trying to fight the urge to break away because this was *Mike* - he’d *never* hurt her. El let herself be held, fingers clutched on his jacket, whispering “I promised” every time his voice broke and he repeated “You came back, you came back to me.”

Hours blurred into days after he let her go to take an ice pack from Joyce, and then the days bled into weeks that became months, then years. She may have been living with the Chief, but home was with the other boys. It was with Mike. It was the healing and safety she found in his brown eyes and his goofy smile that made her heart beat too fast. It was simple explanations of complicated things like daylight savings and the difference between electric and acoustic

guitars and things grew in the spring only to fade away in the fall.

It was something simple becoming complicated.

Because the more time she spent with him, the more things began to change. Lazy summer afternoons spent on the train tracks, arguments about Han Solo against Indiana Jones occupying Dustin, Lucas, and Will, El would find Mike's hand in hers as he tried to translate the argument. Movie marathons with her head on his shoulder, his hands playing with her hair. Endless days in the basement, El drinking in book after book, listening to Mike's dungeon master's voice until the other boys faded away and it was only him and her, and she didn't know why but she wanted to do what he did in the school, put her lips on his the night he promised to take her to the Snowball, the night she tore herself apart to keep that promise... Mike did it sometimes to, kissed her. Under mistletoe, by the living room's frosted window, chasing an explanation for the odd tradition El couldn't wrap her head around. ("It started snowing," El breathed, when she pulled away after a perfect eternity. "Yeah." He looked so red, and they were still so close, and she didn't want to lose that. "It did.") At breakfast the morning of his first day of freshman year as his mother's back was turned. Three days ago when Hopper was picking her up from the Byers' and if his lips had stayed on hers a second longer, they'd have gotten caught by her surrogate father.

El's first move after the impromptu kiss was a frantic phone call to Nancy, her heart beat still strong in her ears. Nancy picked up and the words "I have a crush on Mike" flew out of her mouth before the other girl could say hello. Stunned silence echoed on the other end of the line, then laughter. For *four solid minutes*, Nancy continued to laugh at her.

"What's funny?" El asked, confusion and embarrassment blurring into anger.

"You think, El?" giggled Nancy. "Are you just now figuring that out? Welcome to the party!"

"I- I don't understand."

"Everyone thinks you guys are already dating. I mean, you two act

like it.” On the other end, Nancy sighed. “The hand holding, the staring at each other, didn’t you tell me you kissed him?”

El did. At the top of the basement stair landing on his fifteenth birthday. And then he tripped and fell down the stairs in shock.

“I don’t know what to do.” El admitted. Even though it was a realization she’d been plummeting to for a long time, she still felt... lost. What if Mike didn’t like her back? He kissed her and held her hand and blushed when she said she liked his freckles, that they reminded El of the stars, and she trusted him more than anything in the world- so why hadn’t he asked her out? Eleven knew that’s what boyfriend and girlfriends did, and if everyone thought they were dating, why weren’t they?

“Well, why don’t you ask *him* out?” Nancy told her when El voiced her concern.

“I can do that?”

“Oh, El. It’s the 80s. Women can do whatever they want.” clicking her tongue, Nancy explained. That didn’t make any sense to El either, but step by step Nancy gave El suggestion on how to ask Mike out.

“The movies are always safe. Dinner is kind of step up, but Jonathan and I could always pay for it. Trust me, El. He’s crazy about you. He’ll say yes to *anything* .”

El bit her lip, hanging up without a goodbye or a thank you. Nancy’s advice over the past years had been El’s key to wading the uncharted waters of boys; if Nancy said she could ask Mike out, then she could, right? The next nights she tossed and turned, trying to figure out the way to ask him. Every time, she’d doze off, the smell of old cigarettes and the sound of the Supercom’s static her lullaby, holding onto her plan like the teddy bear Hopper got her, only to wake up in a cold sweat and Papa’s voice ringing in her ears. And she couldn’t do it when she woke. She’d make things awkward- she knew it, she always did. Because she wasn’t like the rest of them.

When Mike knocked on the Byers’ door (Hopper dropped her off, her eyes heavy with sleep, as the sun rose because he was going in early

as he wanted to leave by six for Joyce's birthday dinner) bravery still escaped El and the nightmares still fresh made her fingers twitch and jump when he kissed her cheek as a hello. They lay on the living room floor, hand in hand after giving up on a board game with Will, El not quite listening as Mike talked about how Will had probably cheated. The question "Will you go out with me?" danced on her tongue, so she didn't speak, fearing if she did, the bomb would drop and she'd have ruined everything.

Friends don't lie, a part of her fought, strong when El looked at Mike's smile and the way his eyes lit up. But another part of her, the scared and broken part whispered so loud, *Yes, but I want him to stay my friend. I can't lose him.*

Joyce had saved the day by coming in and asking for a favor. "I'm-I'm completely out of salt, and apparently you can't replace it with baking powder-" El's mouth twisted, remembering Joyce's last attempt at dinner and impressing Hopper. Every year, since Will's miraculous return, Joyce had tried making dinner for the Chief's birthday, and failed all the while denying she had feelings for the man ("It's just a thank you! There's nothing going on between me and Hop!") "Yeah, and I didn't spend a week in the Upside Down!" "That's *not* funny, Will!" "What? It's true! And so is the fact that you like the Chief, Mom!") "And I can pay you, to get it for me."

"We can go to the store for you, Ms. Byers! Sound good to you, El?" Mike offered, almost immediately. But El wasn't as fast to volunteer. Her last trip to the Hawkins' grocery store on Fifth had been... eventful. Hopper had used the word *shitstorm*. Only then, Mike was grabbing her hand and they were out the screen door, heading down mainstream and walking through the automatic doors like they owned the place.

The Prince and Princess of Hawkins, Joyce had called them once.

"Salt, salt, salt, we need salt." Mike muttered, swinging their intertwined fingers back and forth. "That's probably in the baking aisle, right?"

El nodded, half listening. She was too busy trying not to stare at his freckles, the question back shimmering like broken lights in the back

of her mind. Mike led them down another aisle, thankfully *not* the freezer aisle, humming something she thought she'd heard him play on the guitar. Canned goods, pet food, breakfast food, baking goods...

"It's all the way on top."

El and Mike tilted their heads back to look at their goal: a row of blue cylinders, closer to the ceiling than to them, above rows and rows of other ingredients. Sugar on the bottom, flour on top, and then the salt. Like a moth fluttering its wings, El thought she heard a thought of Mike's in her own head.

At least we don't need fifteen hundred pounds of it.

A sea of calm came over El. A new sensation, she was finding, that was so much different than the known storm of anxiety that used to come with using her abilities. But there was safety in the small brick town of Hawkins that did not come with the endless white walls of the lab. She was no longer so afraid of what she was capable of. Her eyes clenched tightly shut, El began to picture the can on the left moving toward the edge, falling with gravity until she could slow it down so Mike could catch it and-

"I got it." El's eyes flew open and Mike was rolling up his sleeves.

"Got what?"

"The salt." He shrugged, the goofy smile back on his face before his back was turned and he was putting his hands on the rim of the eggshell structure, one sneaker on the bottom shelf, the other on the second. With a strangled grunt, Mike pushed himself upwards, heading for the highest ledge his arm could reach like the way a child reaches for a forbidden cookie jar- all before El could close her mouth that had opened in shock.

"Mike- what, *why* are you- Mike! Get back down!" Panic threatened to take her and her breathing quickened as El swung her head side to side to make sure the eyes of shoppers weren't on them.

"I'll be *fine*, El!" insisted Mike, hoisting himself up to the middle ledge. On the ground, El fought the urge to throw her head in her

hands.

“Get down, Mike! I have powers, I can get the salt!”

“No, El. It’s cool, I’m already like halfway up here-”

“Let me get it down! You’re going to get stuck!” And when he was going to get stuck, El was half tempted to simply leave him there and instead spend every single cent they’d been given on Eggos (Joyce’s money originally had been entrusted to Mike as the concepts of change and tax were still muddled in El’s brain, and he had shoved the twenty dollar bill into his jacket pocket- but then, as it usually went, the jacket ended up on El.) and once she was back at the Byers’, she would blame her mouthbreather of a not-boyfriend.

“Pfft, I’m not going to get stuck- *shit woah!* ” Right before her eyes, Mike lost his footing, his right sneaker slipping in a hidden pile of sugar from a broken bag. His legs sprawled out from under him, kicking and swinging back for a ledge, and El’s stomach hit her feet. The aisle almost swayed, it’s shadow creeping closer toward El, then away as only her concentration steadied it. Mike’s sneakers hit the ledge again and he found solid footing next to the sacs of flour as El let out the breath she didn’t know she’d been choking on. The familiar sensation of warmth on her upper lip, and she wiped her nose on Mike’s jacket, ignoring the red.

“Woo! Okay, that was *really* close. Now we know not to do *that* again!” laughed Mike, completely unaware of the daggers El was staring into the back of his cute messy hair. “Almost...” another ledge, another row of flour, “there...”

Mouth! Breather! She wanted to scream. But the anger remained on her tongue, because now shoppers were peaking their heads around the aisle. Swallowing, El gave them a tiny, embarrassed wave. There went her protest of powers- there went *using* her powers- not without a gaining a bigger audience. There went getting this mouthbreather down.

In a movement of grandeur (“He can be such a drama queen,” Nancy had told El one night over the phone when she confided the mistletoe story, and then made the older girl explain what the phrase “drama

queen” meant), Mike threw his leg over the top and into the railing of the structure, and shouted “Got it!” at the top of his lungs, shaking the blue can above his head so she could see. More shoppers had gathered at the mouth of the aisle, eyebrows raised.

“Told you I could do it!” taunted Mike from his perch.

El felt her nostrils flare. He owed her *so many* boxes Eggos now. “Now will you get down?” She half begged, half hissed.

“Okay, okay.” Mike rolled his eyes. “I’m on my way.”

“Thank you.” It was one of the moments she could recognize the way she was taking after Joyce, as she ran her fingers through her hair and then stood with her hands planted on her hips, tapping her foot. (“She’s not *really* your daughter? Are you positive, Joyce? Cause you two look a lot alike.” was a joke that El often overheard coming from Hopper and Joyce; Joyce would roll her eyes, but smile and punch the Chief on the shoulder, insisting El didn’t look like her one bit. Joyce’s vehement protest didn’t help the rumor that was floating around town that El was Chief and Joyce’s illegitimate daughter. “Hey, it’s better than the one James started about you being a witch,” Dustin had pointed out after El figured out the word “illegitimate.”)

“Umm... El?”

“Yes?” El asked, still tapping her foot. Looking up, Mike was looking down at her with a panicked expression.

“Funny story,” nervous laughter echoed down the aisle, and then Mike was casting a glance back at the railing behind him, “my leg... yeah, it’s stuck.” Whispers of their growing audience could be heard from where El stood.

“El?” Mike called down. A minute had gone by, and no answer.

“You.... you *mouthbreather* !” El hissed. “I *told* you you were going to get stuck!”

“Yeah, yeah! I know!”

“Ugh, Mike!” She threw her head back. “I’m breaking up with you.”

"Attention managers on duty, please come to aisle nine, attention managers on duty, please come to aisle nine." a voice over the loud speakers echoed. El swallowed. They were so screwed.

"Hold on-" Mike threw her a look, his eyebrows scrunched together and confusion written all over his features. "-did you just say you're *breaking up* with me?"

"...Yes?"

Mike's cheeks suddenly beamed bright red, and then he didn't even need to say it. What El had just said, hit her like a brick wall and every limb in her body fell away numb. "Wait, how can you *break up* with me... if we aren't even going out?"

She couldn't believe she said that. She said *that*. How could she make a slip up like that? El had put her money on destroying everything she'd ever built with Mike- and that was what she was known for right, destroying beautiful things?- on a single question but here? Here, El had gone and done it with a phrase that didn't even apply.

"Well- I- um-" she stuttered, wondering why on Earth she couldn't just for a *second* be normal, what she wouldn't give to be like other teenage girls who could talk and remember words and Mike was looking at her expectantly and-

"Managers on duty! Please report to aisle nine!"

And El had it.

Stomping her foot, just as Holly was famous for when not getting a new doll or an extra cookie, El placed her hands on her hips and glared up at Mike with every single ounce of fury she could muster. "Well, why *haven't* you asked me out, Mike Wheeler?" The volume of her own voice was foreign in her ears, but confidence never left her, anger strengthening her blood like iron.

"Um- I-well, you see-" It was Mike's turn to stutter incoherently as he tried shaking his leg loose once more, running his hands through his wild hair, cheeks burning red.

"How can you hold my hand and make out with me under the

mistletoe—" Make out. That was the word Dustin had used, and Nancy, and Lucas had too. Better than suck face, at least to yell in the middle of the store. "And not ever ask me out?"

"I- Jesus, El! I mean-"

"Is everything okay down there?" One of their audience members yelled. They sounded more curious than concerned, and in sync, both El and Mike rolled their eyes.

"Everything's fine!" They both yelled. The Prince and Princess of Hawkins and the regular subjects watching, waiting...

But what El needed to hear from Mike next was so much more important than any of them, or any of their opinions. She just needed to know that she hadn't shattered everything into a million pieces. She needed to know she could put them back together again.

"Mike?"

"It's because I didn't want to lose you, okay? I couldn't live through that, not again!" he shouted, and his voice rang throughout the store. His shoulders slumped, but his grip on the railing tightened as he squeezed his eyes shut. "Doing all that stuff with you... kissing you and holding your hand and just being with you.... I know it was more than, than what friends do but I thought- I thought if we put a label on it or I asked you out officially, it would... I don't know- scare you off?"

With every word he spoke, his knuckles grew whiter and El's heart bent, bent, bent until it was breaking, until it was shattering.

Please open your eyes. Please look at me, please, Mike.

"Maybe it would make you afraid cause you weren't ready or maybe, maybe you would finally realize what a loser I was and wake up and find someone better. Someone you deserve. So I took every moment I could get, okay? Trust me, I've wanted to ask you out since the moment you came back, but..."

"You couldn't lose me?" Her own words, finishing his penance, were barely a whisper. But somehow he heard her, and his eyes opened.

Nodding, El gave him a soft smile. "I can't lose you either, Mike"

Their audience, who had crept further and further down the aisle, let out a collective "aw", but El's eyes... they never left Mike's.

"So..." his voice was hesitant, but she could still hear the happiness bleeding into his words. "Do you wanna go out with me?" Mike shut his eyes again, as if bracing for terminal impact, but he only stayed that was for a few milliseconds, because El didn't even hesitate.

"Yes."

Mike's eyes flew open, wide with hope, and he gave her the biggest smile from him she'd seen in a long time. "Yes? You said yes?"

"Yes, Mike." El covered her mouth, trying not to giggle at his enthusiasm. *He's adorable.*

"Are you sure you said yes? You're *absolutely* sure?"

"He's crazy about you. He'll saying yes to anything!"

"Yes!" El repeated. Her heart had leapt up into her throat- she hadn't felt this excited or elated or... happy... in a really long time. Her feet felt like they were floating on air, and she wanted to twirl around in the baking aisle, right then and there. "Now, please! Get down, okay? You can't go out with me if you're stuck up there."

"Right." He flashed her the biggest smile, and El thought she could fly. Well, she thought, she probably could, if she concentrated enough, but it would most likely put her out for a few hours. But that, the idea of her using her powers to fly, if she didn't float away from joy first, did give her another idea.

"Do you need my help?" she called up. The customers at the end of the aisle were exchanging words and whispers. *Show's over!* She wanted to yell, instead shooing them off with a wave of her hand, just like Joyce did to Will, Jonathan, and sometimes her and Hopper.

"No!" Mike yelled down, still sounding excited. "I got it! I think..."

"Managers! Please report to aisle nine! C'mon! Are all of you

seriously on break? Ugh, fine! I'll just go myself, have to do all the work anyway."

"Mike!" El bit her fingernail, knowing they only had *maybe* thirty seconds before store employees were filing in. Store employees chasing them was a cakewalk (Jonathan had taught her that word, and El liked that expression because it reminded her of cake) compared to the Bad Men, but she'd rather not explain this to Hopper, Joyce, or Karen. "Hurry!"

"I'm *trying*, El! My leg's still stuck! Hold on, I think I got it—"

"Hey! You two!" El whipped her head around. At the end of the aisle, they had about twenty feet to gain before they got to them, but there they were, two grumpy store managers, grumbling about being torn away from their break and advancing fast.

"Mike!"

"Give me a second!"

Seventeen feet, fifteen feet if they got there Mike and El would be a in world of trouble, as Hopper would threaten in his "father's voice," if they reached them. Frantically, with shaking hands, El looked around. She needed a distraction.

"We need a distraction!" Will had called out, slamming his fist on the D&D card table.

"Hurry, guys! The monster's gaining!" Dustin's panicked voice rang out as he shook Lucas.

"And he's tired of your incompetence!" roared Mike.

"Dust!" Lucas shouted, making a desperate reach for the dice. "Will, can you create a dust storm?"

A dust storm. Ten feet, nine feet, El eyed the rows and rows of sugar and flour. Eight, seven, six feet.

And with every ounce of power in her, she willed the bags to exploded.

Pop, pop, pop, the paper ripping and plastic opening of each and every bag, and in El's mind a hundred bags seemed to weigh on her, the sounds reminding her of gun fire and for the blink of an eye. El faltered, the temptation to shut down strong. *No*, she willed and continued. The flour and sugar rained over them, covering the whole aisle in a confectioner's blizzard. El willed the new cloud up over Mike, over the customers, over the angry managers. Their own dust storm of cover, made of sugar and flour.

"Mike!" El called over the frantic shouting of those around them. "Are you still stuck?"

"No! But I can't really see through this stuff though! I'm not sure how I'm gonna get down!"

Leave that to her. Now that no one could see- El had saved her face and vision by bringing her hands over heads a millisecond before exploding the bags- she could now get her stupid boyfriend down from the top, the way they *should have* done this before. El began to bring him back to earth, ignoring the steady stream of blood she could now taste, getting ready to let him down gently and-

"Hey! There she is!" one of the angry managers yelled, and El whirled around, dropping Mike. She could see them starting once again through the white powder raining down around them, and her sneakers slid through the piles of it gathering on the floor to where Mike had landed.

"Mike, get up!"

"Ow!" he cradled his head with eyes clenched shut. Flour and sugar covered every inch of him and El made a grab for his hand. "Thanks for the *soft* landing, El-"

"We need to go! C'mon!"

She pulled him up, just as the cloud around them began to clear. And then they were only a few feet from two red eyed managers slipping through the piles to chase them.

"Go! Go! " El shoved Mike into motion, and as the ran through the

aisle, making a break for the automatic doors, Mike took her hand, and El had to fight a smile as she ran all the way back to the Byers, flour and sugar falling in their wake.

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“So you... you just ran?” Joyce repeats, eyebrows raised and hands waving.

Mike nods, and squeezes El’s hand. She gives a quick squeeze back before whispering, “We couldn’t get the salt.” Because Mike had fallen without it. “I’m sorry. It was my fault.”

Joyce lets out a long sigh and Mike turns to her with those wide brown eyes mouthing, “your fault?”

“It’s okay, El. I’m, I guess I’m not angry.” Joyce puts a hand on El’s knee and squeezes. “Hopper on the other hand...” she trails off and El swallows. Hopper is the *last* person she wants to tell right now.

“So let me get this straight,” Jonathan pops around the corner, holding a frying pan and simultaneously trying to drain the bacon grease into an old aluminium can. El sinks in her chair, knowing they were listening the whole time. “You two found the salt, Mike climbed up the aisle to get the salt because it was on the very top even though El could have, I dunno, gotten it with her powers, Mike then got stuck up there, and then when you two were about to get caught El exploded all the flour and sugar to make it so nobody could see her getting you back down, Mike?”

El and Mike nod, but share a quick look and a smile. They had left out some of the story, the part about El asserting they should break up walking them backwards into finally, *finally*, dating. But with Jonathan and Will eavesdropping in the kitchen and the almost certainty Joyce would repeat those specific details to the Chief, they kept it their secret.

Jonathan snickers, shaking his head. “I can’t wait to tell Nancy all of this.”

Oh, like El wouldn’t tell Nancy all of this on the phone later.

Beside her, Mike shifts and an annoyed look comes over his features. "Does Nancy know you wear a "Kiss the Cook" apron when you make breakfast?"

"Yeah I think she bought it for him," Will gestures to the red apron Jonathan's wearing, and Mike slumps further into his chair.

"Okay, you two, go get cleaned up." Joyce shoos them away from the table. "Hop's going to be here soon, and I'd rather explain it him with you clean instead of covered in flour." she laughs but El is out of her chair, dropping Mike's hand.

"You're going to tell him?" El fights the hope budding in her stomach, clutching her hands.

Joyce nods and reaches out a hand to ruffle El's hair. "We'll tell him together." Relief floods El's body, and El envelopes Joyce in a hug.

"Thank you." she whispers.

"You owe me, kiddo." laughs Joyce, as Jonathan announces "Dinner is ready!"

"It's not even dinner!" Mike rolls his eyes but then Will is teasing and saying that for that he's not getting any pancakes or bacon and Jonathan drives the insult home with "Yeah, flour boy!" and Mike's had it, now out of his chair and trying to steal bacon from the plate Will guards.

"Just give me a piece, Will!" He's yelling when El comes back from the bathroom, having changed into a spare outfit (She was spending more and more weekends there, and the more weekends she spent, the harder it was to believe Joyce or Hopper when they insisted that *absolutely nothing* was going on.) and brushed most of the flour out of her hair. What she really needs is a shower, but the sun was already setting and she's more worried about Mike leaving before they can talk.

"No!" Will shouts, waving a spatula at Mike, who keeps making a reach for it.

"It's what you get for disrespecting Byers' night-breakfast!" laughs

Jonathan, practically doubled over.

“Hey, you started it-” Mike insists but it only makes Will more defensive and Jonathan laughs harder.

“Boys!” Joyce warns, but El is shaking her head, catching Mike’s brown eyes and walking back towards the living room. He follows, just as she knew he always would.

They have something to talk about.

“Hey,” he stands, brushing the hair out of his eyes, before her by the screen door. She takes both his hands and waits for him to finish. “I should probably go.”

“Why?” El’s stomach drops and it’s hard to keep the disappointment out of her voice. “Did you not want to stay for dinner?”

Mike shakes his head. “No, I do, but I promised my mom I’d watch Holly tonight so she and my Dad could go to this fancy French restaurant. Trust me, I’d rather be here facing Hopper than playing ponies with Hol.”

“But Holly loves it.” she reminds him. It earns her a small smile. “And you like doing the voices for the horses, so you shouldn’t complain.”

He throws his head back in laughter. “Yeah, yeah, you got me there. Doing the voices is really fun...” Mike trails off, rubbing his neck.

They stand there until the silence threatens to swallow them. El is playing the events of the last hours in her head, trying not to lose her bravery to panic. But they keep standing there, and it’s like he’s waiting for her to say something, anything because the words “*I can’t lose you*” echo in both their brains.

And that’s all she needs. Because he’s not going to lose her and she’s not going to lose him. That’s a bargain, a promise, she’s willing to make.

“So,” El breathes and his brown eyes stare at her, “See you Saturday night?”

“Saturday night? What?” Confusion comes over his face and El’s grip on his hands tighten. She can’t believe him. They didn’t just go through all of that to end up back at square one, did they? Oh, he was such a mouth breather.

“Boys can be so stupid sometimes.” Nancy had told her over the phone. El nodded then, laughing as she could hear Jonathan protesting from the other line.

“Do you still want to go out with me?” her voice is small. “Saturday works for me.”

Suddenly, his confused look melts away and his eyes widen. “Oh... Oh! Oh yeah! Yeah, of course I still want to go, why would I not want to go, I mean I probably don’t have anything planned but if I do I’ll like cancel it right away because-”

“Mike,” El sighs.

“Yeah?” his blabbering stops and he takes a deep breath. “Sorry... Where, where do you want to go? For, for our date?”

“Anywhere works for me. Anywhere that’s not a grocery store.”

That’s a good attempt a joke, right?

Her answer comes when he breaks out in laughter. “Oh God, no, never again!”

“The movies are always safe.”

“How about the movies?”

“Yeah, yeah the movies work great! Um, what movie do you want to, uh, go see?”

He’s so red, and even though she’s told him yes, told him yes multiple times, he still seems in shock and El can sense he’s doing everything he can to hold this together, but he’s falling apart.

“We can chose when we get there.” El squeezes his hand. It seems to calm him down, and he meets her eyes.

There's something pulling her towards him then, and she doesn't think his gaze is on anywhere but her own lips. She meets him halfway, their first kiss as *actual* boyfriend and girlfriend, his hands gently brushing her hips and her hands finding his cheeks, and El swears she's on top of the world. He tastes like flour, and she smiles into the kiss.

She pulls away, drinking in the way his eyes stay closed and the dazed look on his face.

"El!" Joyce calls out, and the rest of the moment shatters. "Can you come help us set the table?"

"Coming!" El yells back, trying to keep the annoyance out her voice.

"I should probably go now..." Mike admits. He pulls away from her, even if the look on his face tells El he *really* doesn't want to.

"See you Saturday night, Mike." she smiles and he backs up in a daze toward the screen door. She doesn't say goodbye anymore. She hasn't said goodbye since that night.

"See you Saturday night, El."

Saturday night will come and it will go, Mike will pick her up looking adorable in a sweater vest and El will walk out of the Chief's lakehouse not listening to threats or her curfew time after Nancy's has spent the entire afternoon having her try on outfits and jewelry and hairstyles. They'll see some movie but El won't really pay attention, and she'll remember more of the time she and Mike lay on the hood of his car, hand and hand and she asks him why he wouldn't just let her get the salt down.

"I know sometimes using your powers doesn't really bring back fun memories," he'll whisper and push a piece of escaped hair away from her face. "I didn't want to do anything you weren't okay with doing."

She'll nod, running out of words so instead leans into him, and time falls away as he kisses her under the stars.

But that will be on Saturday night because for now. El stands with her back to the screen door, smiling to herself as Mike runs down the

Byers' driveway, shouting and jumping and dancing away in victory.

"She said yes! She said yes!"

Author's Note:

reviews are my life blood. they keep me writing.

but please know I love all of you for reading my stuff
and I'm very grateful and would totally give you a
hug irl.

come stop by and say hi @sstrangerthaneleven! also
go say hi to the cinnamon roll who beta'd this
@elevenperalta.

should i stay or should i go; mix-tape track:
starving// hailee stienfled & grey feat. zedd